

## **First meeting of the Victim Service Coordinating Council**

(February 2, 2007)

All Council members were present.

The meeting began with introductions. Each council member stated their name. Their affiliation, and something they'd like to see come out of the project.

Ashlie Lancaster gave a brief introduction about the role of the State Office of Victim Assistance.

Dana DeHart gave an overview of the council's purpose and how we would proceed.

Panelist Graham Barnes conducted an activity illustrating how different service responders would respond after a 911 call. First he illustrated how the two responders for whom victim safety was a focus helped change the entire system's response. He noted that the two individuals with the least institutional power brought the victim's voice to the table. These two individuals must work effectively with all the other components of the system, so there is no "us versus them." The victim advocates must maintain relationships with justice responders, while still sitting on the outside of the justice system. In order to get buy-in from justice responders in victim advocates must do something useful for justice responders. They offer things to the system then the system becomes dependent upon the victim advocates. In that way, the victim advocates have the power to change the system.

Graham illustrated how victims might fall through the gaps between agencies, and how offenders might climb through these gaps. He noted that the Duluth model works to plug the gaps between agencies. The Duluth model focuses on how institutions share information with one another to assure that victim safety is built into each step of process of response. He noted the Duluth model depended upon policies, practices that linked different responders, an entity that tracks and monitors cases, and bringing together practitioners to talk in small meetings. He noted that interagency problems were addressed in separate agency-to-agency meetings. The solutions fashioned at this level were then taken to larger meetings.

Graham noted that many systems face the problem of victims being treated as perpetrators because they fight back. Another problem is that the power of the state extends to control the victim.

Graham indicated that achievements of the Duluth model typically took one to two years per system change. After about five years, the entire system would need to be revised in accord with evolving needs.

Graham indicated that Spartanburg was conducting a good example of a safety and accountability audit. Safety and accountability audits look at all aspects of each person's job and see what needs to change. The focus is not on the individual. Use of stereotypes is not helpful. Rather, the institution frames each responder's job. The first step of the safety and accountability audit is to understand the worker's role, what they're working with, what their policy is. Then build a response into the institutional framework.

Battered women are as much at risk from the system as from the batterer if they don't understand the system or are alienated from it. In Duluth, they encourage regularly convening focus groups of people who have experienced the system and are coming out of the system.

Panelist JAC Patrissi discussed a victim service advisory group, which was formed through a victim service 2000 grant from OVC. They gather relevant leadership from across Vermont and ask them to support an examination of how well their agency was equipped to respond to victims. They wanted to conceptualize the response in terms of the core rights of victims: safety, information, validation, choice, and information. They asked, "What are you doing to address these things?" They found that many agencies did not believe that their response should address core rights. The facilitators used Susan Herman's work on parallel justice to create a philosophical shift. They asked, "What could you do to help victims rebuild their lives? What is possible?"

A leadership group developed vision, mission, and goals statements. But first it was necessary to recognize and articulate their underlying philosophical differences in terms of grassroots, law and order, and compensation services. They discussed how to honor their philosophical roots and have to take into account the limits of each perspective.

The group developed written benchmarks as a mechanism for accountability. They conducted small structured interviews around the state of groups that impact survivors. They examined what the problems were and what accountability would look like. They framed the conversation around practices and solutions, many of which came from the initial assessment. Some solutions were developed in small groups as practices were assessed in terms of whether they provided justice, what was working, and what was not working. This process spawned many different projects: they developed a domestic violence unit, there was an elder abuse project that they started through a collaborative grant, they established a restitution unit that worked with corrections (with restitution administered to the victim upfront and the agency being responsible for collection, giving the agencies a stake in whether restitution works), there was development of law enforcement victim advocates, and there were changes with court administration. Focus groups were held concurrently with their development of vision, mission, and values statements. Then they launched into all of these projects simultaneously.

The group had to take seriously the different levels of working together. Collaboration is a big commitment. They had to acknowledge that each would not be in charge the way they had used to have been. They discussed when they would want to share power. They would also share tangible outcomes. They realized there was a need for a champion for any given project. This was necessary to drive the collaboration, to promote follow-through, and to make sure there were short-term successes so they can keep going in the long-term. Each member of the group served as champions.

They also learned that they must understand the language of the others with whom they were working to find a way to approach each step in a coordinated process. To promote this they engaged in experiential activities such as drive-alongs, going to prisons, meeting at different agencies, and so on. They named the differences between themselves in a fact-based manner. They found overlaps in their philosophies and stayed on what they agreed on.

JAC and council members emphasized importance of systematic surveys and focus groups to gather agencies and victims in order to identify problems. JAC noted that having victims present at meetings changed what service responders said...talking in front of victims shifted how they spoke.

Panelist Anne Seymour began in noting that the foundation of this work is based on two approaches to working with victims: the systems approach and the empowerment approach. Sometimes there's too much of a focus on the system when most violent crime is not reported.

Anne encouraged the Council to think about who was not at the table, often victims or underserved groups. Anne encouraged talking to victims about why they report or don't report, why they seek services or don't seek services. Anne also encouraged involving communities as a whole, for instance civic and faith-based groups. She encouraged getting victims and survivors involved through focus groups and interviews. She encouraged victim satisfaction surveys of about 10 questions. It was noted that compensation services might be an entry point for sampling across people with a range of experiences (i.e., not just persons who were dissatisfied, in that polarized samples are often obtained via satisfaction surveys).

Anne noted the necessity of a strategic plan that included values, mission, vision, goals, and measurable objectives for evaluation. Anne noted that having these things makes it easy to say, "No" so that the Council doesn't have to take on everything. A council cannot be everything to everybody. She encouraged doing a few things well: starting small and building upon the successes. If there are not short-term successes, then the Council will lose people in the pursuit of long-term goals.

Another foundation issue was figuring out time and volunteer commitments for Council members. Being on Council ends up building capacity in creating leadership; people get new skills.

Anne encouraged learning not only from successes of existing national models, but also from mistakes they can identify from their experiences. She provided examples of different states that had models (e.g., WA made changes in organization of their victim service offices; CO had a VS2000 project through OVC; OR had a very good needs assessment process). About 20 other states have done this.

The group broke for lunch.

Following lunch, there was a large group discussion of priority areas. It was noted that the section of law that drives victim services was written in 1984, and lots has changed since then: the Prosecution Commission has a certification process; where there was once a single advocate there are now fully staffed agencies; and the law is outdated. It was suggested that a good starting point would be to review each item in this legislation, applying a modern perspective and having the law reflect reality. In fact, Doug Smith introduced a bill to do away with this section of the law; a revision would certainly be preferable for council members.

A Council member noted that one consideration would be what role did folks want SOVA to play in directing victim services on a statewide basis, and to what degree are private and nonprofit agencies willing to abide by state agency standards.

It was noted that there is lots of duplication in the overall service system, and there is a need for an explanation of what different entities do. Some of what agencies do is outlined in Act 141, which needs tweaking. There is no delineation of the entire range of who does what, who is involved in victim services (i.e., the “cast” of victim services in SC) and how they interact in various ways. This could be part of the Council’s mission and vision: what would the ideal victim service system look like. It could address duplication issues. It was suggested that delineating roles, responsibilities, and relationships might be a number-one priority for the Council. Anne Seymour noted that, in light of the legislative audit of victim services, the Victim Service Coordinating Council may want to define victim services before someone else (i.e., the Audit Council) does.

There was some discussion of who the Audit Council spoke with, and it was noted that Senator Thomas’ request for an audit was not prescriptive enough. Many who were interviewed for the audit felt there was some indication that the Legislative Audit Council (LAC) wondered why SC couldn’t just have one agency providing all victim services, and that LAC’s questioning indicated they had drawn conclusions before they completed the audit. This could stem from LAC’s lack of understanding regarding basics of victim services, as well as from Sanford’s push to streamline services in general. JAC noted that in VT, they had adopted standards because they didn’t want to be audited and have the audit frame the victim service system’s “problems.” Thus, the victim service agencies adopted standards to show accountability. As one council member noted that LAC didn’t understand why a single advocate couldn’t lead the victim throughout various phases of the justice process, Anne Seymour noted the importance of understanding the conflict of interest this would create because of the different affiliations and philosophies between and among different agencies.

It was noted that true duplication in the system exists because “how the torch is passed” is not defined. There are certainly conflicts as different advocates disagree on who should be serving the victim (e.g., court accompaniment). Maybe the victim should decide, to some extent, how the torch is passed. 16-3-1500 is intended to delineate how the torch is passed.

It was noted that SC was a state of “haves” and “have-nots.” It was emphasized that, whatever the Coordinating Council does, they should keep in mind they can’t ask those that “don’t have” to do something that requires substantial funds. That would only create a sense of false hope for victims.

There was some discussion of how funding decisions are made. It was suggested that a matrix would be helpful to identify where the money is and where it is needed. Perhaps reporting procedures require a change. Maybe there is a way to reward cooperation in serving victims. Anne Seymour noted that OH developed a coordinating council based entirely on the funders. JAC noted that VT’s funders meet once a year. In SC, there are informal meetings among some of the victim service funders. It was suggested that there is a need to institutionalize a comprehensive meeting of funders in SC. Funders include DHEC, DSS, DPS, PCC, HHS, county councils, and municipal councils, among others. There’s no standardization of how they administer funds; rather, often decisions are made within each’s “fiefdom.”

SC’s Adult Protection Council was discussed as an example of a permanent council which has helped in a number of ways to address adult-protection issues, including examining legislative

proposals. It was suggested that assuring a permanent Victim Service Coordinating Council would be a great step.

It was noted that a 1999 victim service subcommittee developed a report with great recommendations and listed every source of funds. There were controversial elements of the report, as well as disbanding of the committee, both of which may have contributed to failure to implement report recommendations. That report would be useful to inform this Council's functioning.

One Council member noted difficulty for victims in navigating the system, particularly that some advocates had been thrust into their jobs unprepared. This would imply that screening and training of advocates may be an issue to address.

An important task of this Council should be to circulate and build a list of what other players need to be linked to this process (e.g., via subcommittees or otherwise).

The Council convened three break-out groups, each with a facilitator. Priority areas for the Council were developed by each group.

#### Group One

- Create an inventory of all agency roles and enumerate responsibilities of each.
- Conduct cross-training among all agencies.
- Develop a mechanism that holds the system accountable to victims across jurisdictions and agencies.
- Develop standards and certification, including a mechanism for accountability that gives these standards “teeth.”
- Support local responders via collaboration and grants in order to build local confidence.
- Develop a legislative subcommittee to research proposals and get ahead of the curve, including making sure that 141 funds are administered and ensuring accountability for how the funds are used.
- Support public service announcements to raise awareness of services.
- Develop a list of who needs to be included in Council functioning.
- Explore process and feasibility of a safety and accountability audit.

#### Group Two

This group developed short-term goals that could be accomplished by our June deadline.

Following this, there should be development of three-to-five-year goals.

- Make the council permanent and explicate the cast of characters to be involved (e.g., core members and other stakeholders). This Victim Service Coordinating Council should continue; the Council should become the “go-to” entity (e.g., for legislators and others); it should be the premiere victim-service body.
- Define what an effective system looks like.
- Define what victim advocates of varied types do—their roles, responsibilities, relationships, as a starting point.
- Pilot test—through surveys or focus groups—identification of the needs of specific victim populations. Based on this input, develop some small solutions that can be implemented in the short-term; success of these solutions will breed success.

### Group Three

- Find out who is doing what where in victim services. There are inequities across geographic areas and jurisdictions.
- Explore VT's restitution-first model, including its relationship to their compensation fund.
- Develop a victim service survey or "report card." DJJ, DPPPS, and others may have models that they use already.
- Identify who is marginalized among victims and develop strategies to reach them.
- Support jurisdictional teams to address interagency coordination and gaps. Some models may exist in Charleston. Conversely, in some cases, greater centralization of services may be called for.
- Examine issues of forensic-exam funding and what this looks like in other states. Victims are being pressured at the time of exams, and many victims may not be documented. EVAW has been assessing fallout of victims in the system and has preliminary data. Ft. Jackson may have a model for anonymous exams. Expand funding to include domestic violence and child abuse/neglect exams with collection locations across the state.
- Find a different method of dealing with reserve cash that is built up when agencies don't spend their funding. Perhaps there needs to be an actuarial study about how much money SOVA needs to be a prudent provider of funds/services.
- Develop accountability for earmarked funds. In some systems-based agencies, money is being channeled into administration of the institution and not into advocacy.
- Help develop standardized reporting around how money is spent across agencies.
- Increase education of forensic nurses and doctors on evidence collection.
- Develop a system of flexibility for access to compensation-funded counseling so that victims may seek counseling when key events occur.
- Develop working groups within this coordinating council (e.g., on finances, surveying, roles of advocates).

JAC and Anne Seymour will provide some resources to the Council, including sample vision/mission/values statements, information on VT's restitution system, and worksheets for strategic planning. Dana will send folks a copy of Act 141.

The next meeting was scheduled for Friday, March 2, 2007. Dana will provide further information soon. In the interim, we will circulate a document to identify stakeholders.